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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 RIYADH 009402

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DHAHRAN SENDS
PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM SA

SUBJECT: SAG OFFSETS SHI'A STRENGTH IN ITS APPOINTMENTS TO
EP MUNICIPAL COUNCILS

REF: A. RIYADH 9303

B. RIYADH 8323

C. RIYADH 1436 (NOTAL)

D. RIYADH 1337

E. RIYADH 1336

F. RIYADH 1335

G. RIYADH 1334

Classified by Consul General John Kincannon for reasons 1.4

(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The SAG announced its appointments to municipal councils nationwide, including those of the Eastern Province (EP), on December 14. As expected by many observers, the government used the appointments to balance the Shi'a presence on the councils in Qatif and Al-Hasa: elected members on these councils are almost entirely Shi'a, whereas appointed ones are almost all Sunni. The appointees to the metropolitan Dammam municipal council are generally well-known and respected professionals; the extensive commitments of several of them raise questions about their ability to participate effectively, however. Although council members are reportedly actively jockeying for the two elected positions within each council, EP residents appear to have adopted a "wait and see" approach to the councils' impact. End summary.

Background

12. (C) Municipal councils, a newly revived institution in Saudi Arabia, are composed of elected and appointed members in equal proportion (ref A). There are 16 municipal councils in the EP, with 118 total members; the number of members per council ranges from 14 to 4 and varies roughly according to the population of the area represented. Elections for the 59 contested seats took place on March 3, 2005. Shi'a candidates took all six of the elected seats in Qatif (ref F), where Shi'a comprise the overwhelming majority of the population, and five of six seats in Al-Hasa (ref E), where Shi'a likely comprise somewhat less than 50 percent of the population. Winners of the seven contested seats in greater Dammam (ref G) tended to be well-educated, successful professionals and included several religious conservatives, whereas winners in the less urban areas of the EP (refs C and D) tended to have strong local tribal affiliations.

13. (U) Prince Miteb bin Abdul Aziz, Minister of Municipal Affairs, announced the SAG's appointments to councils nationwide on December 14. One of the appointees to each council holds the senior executive position in the corresponding municipality and is appointed in that capacity, rather than as an individual. (For example, the mayor of Qatif was appointed to the Qatif municipal council; should a new mayor be appointed, he would then assume the mayor's position on the council.) The appointed members are listed in the last paragraph of this cable along with a brief biographic summary for those individuals with whom post is familiar. Refs C - G list the elected council members.

SAG Appointments: A Balancing Act

14. (C) The most striking feature of the appointments in the EP is the Sunni/Shi'a breakdown in Qatif and Al-Hasa. Shi'a candidates took all five of the elected seats in Qatif and five of six in Al-Hasa, but on each council all but one of the appointed members are Sunni. Jafar Al-Shayeb, an elected member of the Qatif municipal council, predicted the outcome in Qatif to us a week before the official announcement. "Although almost all Qatifis are Shi'a," he noted, "the government will appoint Sunnis to the Qatif municipal council to balance the elected members." He anticipated a good working relationship with two of the appointed members but a more difficult relationship with two others. Tayseer Al-Khunaizi, a liberal activist from Qatif, said he was not familiar with most of the Sunni appointees to the Qatif council: "They are not real Qatifis, so they cannot be that

representative of the people."

15. (C) The SAG appointed technocrats from respected professions and institutions to the metropolitan Dammam council, including Khalid Al-Falih, a senior vice-president at Aramco, and Dr. Abdullah Al-Qadi, Secretary General of the EP Benevolence Society. The appointment of high-powered businessmen, such as Al-Falih and SABIC Secretary General Hamad Al-Mahdi (in Jubail), raise questions about the ability of council members to devote significant time to council work. A senior Aramco employee expressed surprise to the CG at Al-Falih's appointment: "He has an exceptionally busy international travel schedule and has a full slate at Aramco. I can't see him attending many council meetings."

Members Jockey for Position While the Public Waits

16. (C) According to the councils' by-laws, the councils will elect a president and vice president at their first meeting. Stories in the EP media suggest that jockeying for these positions among council members has already begun. For example, Al-Youn, the EP daily, reported on December 18 that members of the Qatif council had reached informal consensus on electing an elected member as president and an appointed member as vice president. The brother of one of the elected Qatif council members confirmed to us that the members (minus the mayor) had already met informally. (Note: Post would not be surprised if Jafar Al-Shayeb is elected president. End note.) EP residents outside the councils whose opinion Post has gauged, on the other hand, have taken more of a "wait and see" approach to the councils. "The government can do whatever it wants to do," said a retired local businessman. "What we need are more schools and more jobs. Let's see if the councils help with that."

Comment

17. (C) In post's opinion, a "wait and see" approach is certainly justified in gauging the impact of the municipal councils in the EP. The councils' actual governance role will only become clear over time, but in a state where the power is so centralized and the role of municipalities so circumscribed (ref B), it is unlikely that local municipal officials will easily yield what little authority they have to the councils. One possible scenario is that the municipal councils will play no greater a role than the appointed consultative councils (ref B). In theory, these councils advise the province's Emir and local governors, but in practice, contacts tell us, they do little more than rubber stamp decisions. A more hopeful scenario for the EP councils is that they will force a greater degree of accountability on municipal officials and spread quasi-democratic practices more broadly in Saudi society. Achieving greater accountability will likely take active, visible participation and creative use of the media by the councils' elected members. End comment.

Names or Positions of Appointed EP Council Members

18. (SBU) Individuals appointed to EP councils are listed below by council, with brief biographic information where available.

Metropolitan Dammam (seven appointed members; includes Dammam, Khobar, and Dhahran)

--Mayor of Eastern Province (current mayor is HE Dhaifallah Al-Otaibi, a retired Saudi Aramco executive and a Sunni)
--Abd Al-Jawad, Ehsan Fareed (Sunni; businessman; board member of the EP Chamber of Commerce & Industry and chair of its marine committee; U.S. educated)
--Al-Mazyani, Jamal Abdullah (Sunni; prominent lawyer; EP magnate Ma'an Al-Sanea is one of his clients)
--Al-Faleh, Khalid Abdul Aziz (Sunni; Senior VP for Industrial Relations, Saudi Aramco)
--Al-Bayat, Dr. Sameer Alwan (Shi'ite; faculty member at King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM))
--Al-Ashban, Dr. Aref Abdullah (Sunni; faculty member at KFUPM)
--Al-Qadhi, Dr. Abdullah Husein (Sunni; Secretary General of the EP Benevolence Society, Al-Bir; faculty member, King Faisal University (KFU); U.S. educated with a degree in urban planning)

Al-Hasa Governorate (six appointed members)

--Mayor of Al-Ahsa Governorate (current mayor is Eng. Fahd Mohammad al-Jubair, a Sunni)
--Al-Afaleq, Saleh Hasan Abdullah (Sunni; businessman; nephew of leading businessman and Al-Ahsa chamber founding member

and president Abdul Aziz Al-Afaleq; family is major shareholder in Al-Ahsa Intercontinental Hotel)
--Al-Shaikh, Abd Al-Baqi Mohammad Ibrahim (Sunni; judge; from the well-known Al-Mubarak family in al-Ahsa, whose members follow the Malaki school of Islamic jurisprudence rather than the Hanbali/Wahhabi school)
--Al-Ayyaf, Abdul Aziz Khalid Othman (Sunni; formerly Secretary General of Al-Hasa Chamber of Commerce & Industry;

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recently appointed Secretary General of EP Chamber of Commerce & Industry)
--Al-Bahrani, Abdul Aziz Matouq Ahmad (Shi'ite; faculty member, KFU - Al-Ahsa)
--Al-Arfaj, Dr. Abd Al-Mohsin bin Husein Mohammad (Sunni; Director-General, Al-Ahsa Benevolence Society; faculty member, KFU - Al-Ahsa)

Qatif Governorate (five appointed members)

--Mayor of Qatif Governorate (current mayor of Qatif is Khalid Al-Dossari, a Sunni and KFUPM graduate with extensive travel experience and favorable views toward the U.S.)
--Al-Khalidi, Khalid Abdul Aziz bin Aql (Sunni; employee of Saudi Electric Company)
--Al-Sikairi, Dr. Abdullah Naji Eisa (Shi'ite; faculty member, KFUPM)
--Al-Mulaihi, Faleh bin Zaid Nasser (Sunni; Dammam-based businessman with real estate investments in Qatif)
--Al-Awad, Eng. Murshid Saleh Murshid (Sunni; engineer at Saudi Aramco)

Hafr Al-Batin Governorate (five appointed members)

--Mayor of Hafr Al-Batin Governorate
--Al-Khilaihi, Khalid Saleh Nasser (from prominent business family in Hafr Al-Batin)
--Al-Mutairi, Dr. Adi Husein Adi
--Al-Turki, Abdul Aziz Abd Al-Rahman Ahmad (owns shopping mall in Hafr Al-Batin)
--Al-Mas'ar, Eng. Nasser Ali Shay'ea

Abqaiq Governorate (four appointed members)

--Mayor of Abqaiq Governorate
--Al-Shammary, Saud Ghudayr Faraj
--Al-Otaibi, Fayhan Hamoud bin Naqa
--Al-Hajri, Eng. Mohammad 'Aloush Mohammad

Jubail Governorate (four appointed members)

--Mayor of Jubail Governorate
--Al-Madhi, Hamad Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Aziz (Director General of SABIC)
--Al-Saloum, Khalid Hasan Abdullah
--Al-Bouainain, Abdul Aziz Yousef Al-Ahmad (from a well-known local fishing family)

Khafji Governorate (four appointed members)

--Mayor of Khafji Governorate
--Hilal, Khalid Mohammad Husein
--Al-Qahtani, Odays Khushain Nasser
--Al-Dawi, Munaikher Jabber Munaikher

Malija Municipality (three appointed members)

--Mayor of Malija Municipality
--Al-'Abian, Saud Saad Mubarak
--Al-Dosari, Mubarak Fayhan Mubarak

Nouairiya Governorate (three appointed members)

--Mayor of Nouairiya Governorate
--Hathlain, Mish'al bin Abdullah Mohammad
--Al-Mari, Nasser Fuhaid Nasser

Rafi'a Municipality (three appointed members)

--Mayor of Al-Rafiya Municipality
--Al-Duwaish, Abdul Aziz Sa'afaq Hakem
--Al-Duwaish, Nawaf Sultan Al-Hamidi

Ras Tanura Governorate (three appointed members)

--Mayor of Ras Tanura Governorate
--Al-Zou'abi, Abdul Aziz Abd Al-Rahman Abdul Aziz Al-Zuhairan
--Al-Ansari, Nasser Husein Ahmad

Yibreen Municipality (three appointed members)

--Mayor of Yibreen Municipality
--Al-'Iraq, Jaber Saleh 'Amr
--Al-Mari, Zaid Rashed Hiza

Qarya Al-Ulya Governorate (three appointed members)

--Mayor of Qarya Al-Ulya Governorate
--Al-Mutairi, Abdullah Hamoud Iqab Al-Shitaili
--Al-Duwaish, Faisal Nughaimish Iqab
--Al-Duwaish, Fawaz Majid Mohammad

(Note: One of the latter three individuals was elected, not appointed, but we did not report his name in ref D. We believe it was Fawaz Al-Duwaish but are not certain. End note.)

Al-Lahaba Rural Complex (two appointed members)

--Mayor of Al-Lahaba Rural Complex
--Al-Duwaish, Badr Mohammad Mutlaq

Sa'era Rural Complex (two appointed members)

--Mayor of Al-Saeera Rural Complex
--Al-Mutairi, Khalid Haza'a Mohammad

Sarar Rural Complex (two appointed members)

--Mayor of Al-Sarar Rural Complex
--Al-Ajmi, Aloush Qamdan Abdullah

(Note: Post translated this list from a newspaper report. Post followed the designations of the geographical units given in the newspaper report rather than the designations given in refs C - G. For example, the "rural complexes" were designated as "administrative posts" in reftels. End note.)

(APPROVED: KINCANNON)
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